

Self-Assessment Review

Statewide Analysis



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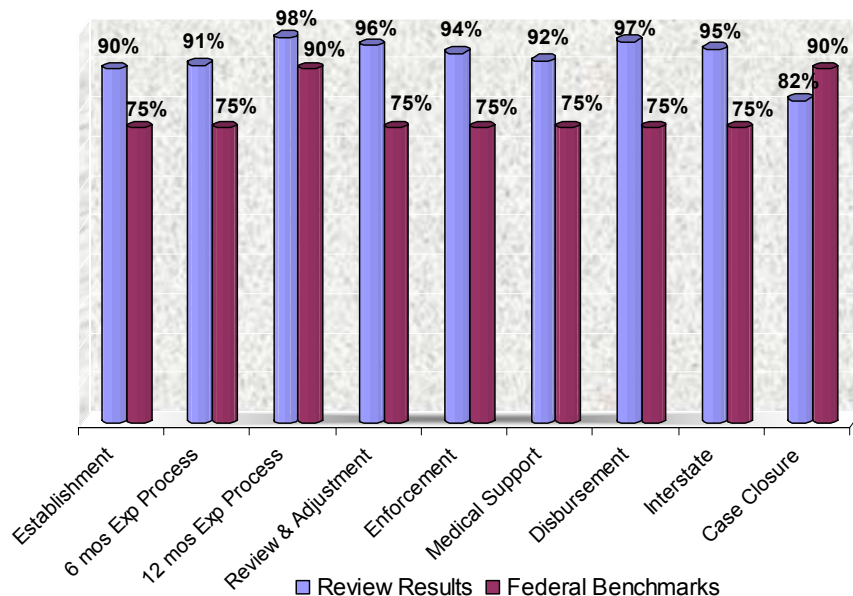
Executive Summary

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) requires states to develop a self-assessment process and submit an annual report detailing compliance in eight program areas:

- Order and Paternity Establishment
- Expedited Process (6-month and 12-month)
- Review and Adjustment
- Enforcement
- Medical
- Disbursement
- Interstate
- Case Closure

Federal regulations require that each state meet a minimum compliance standard of 75 percent for each of these programs, with the exception of the expedited process (12-month) and case closure. These two program areas must meet a minimum compliance standard of 90 percent. The program compliance graph below shows Washington's program compliance levels compared with the corresponding minimum compliance benchmarks.

FFY 2003 Self-Assessment Program Compliance

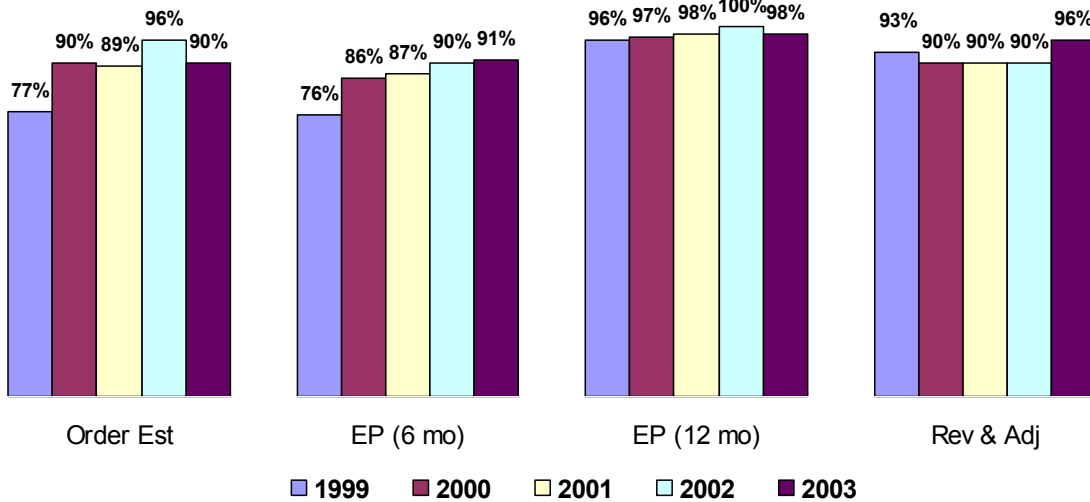


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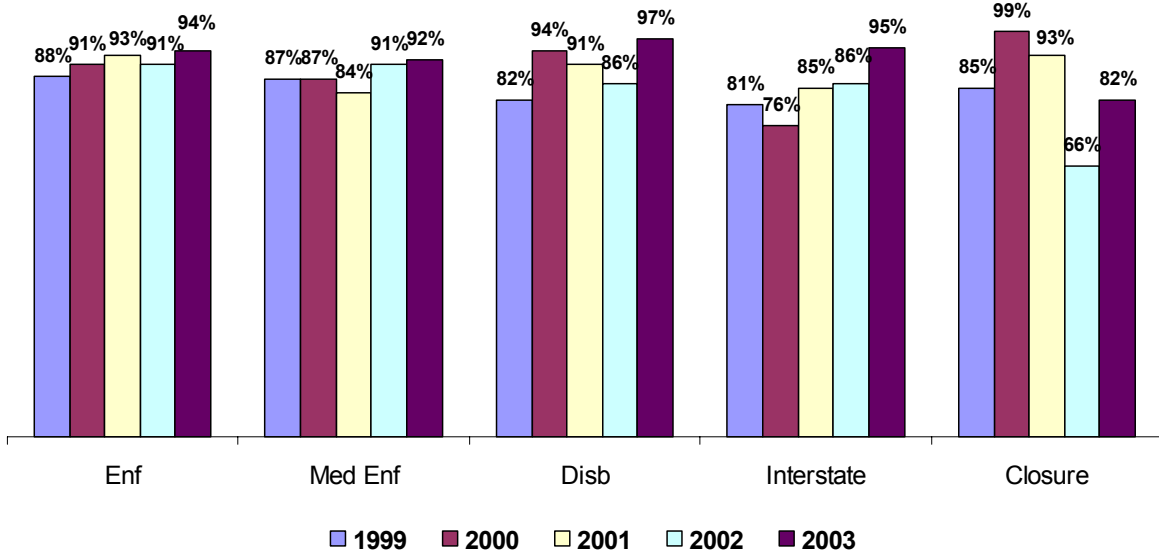
In last year's review, Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2002, we met or exceeded the required compliance standards in all program areas except case closure (66 percent compliance). FFY03 review results show improvement. Although case closure compliance of 82 percent is still below the minimum compliance standard, there is a 16 percentage point improvement in compliance over last year's results. This improvement resulted because DCS implemented a comprehensive corrective action plan.

Because of the timing of the annual review and the fact that the federal fiscal year is complete when the review is performed, it was not possible to implement the corrective action plan in time to affect the entire federal fiscal year 2003 results. Page 22 of this report details the quarterly progress made on this corrective action plan.

Program Compliance By Year



Program Compliance By Year



Introduction

The Washington State Division of Child Support (DCS) is part of the Economic Services Administration (ESA), which is the combined IV-A / IV-D administration within Washington's Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The organizational structure of DCS consists of 11 offices - a headquarters office and ten district offices.

Washington State uses both court and administrative processes for establishment and enforcement of child support and medical support orders. DCS contracts with the majority of the 39 county prosecuting attorney offices. DCS partners with them for paternity establishment when the administrative process cannot be used, for modification of court ordered child and medical support and in child support contempt actions.

Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, each state must submit an annual report detailing compliance in the selected program areas. States are also encouraged to discuss how program administration affects performance outcomes and various other topics such as innovative practices, correlation with federal performance incentives, customer service, etc.

The Audit Team within the headquarters Management and Audit Program Statistics Unit (MAPS) is responsible for conducting internal program and data reliability audits. The Audit Team is made up of program analysts who have extensive child support program experience at the field office and headquarters level. This knowledge and experience is critical in performing comprehensive audits of child support program performance requirements and finding correlations between review results and federal outcome measures.

The following report addresses program compliance, provides management information and discusses innovations used to increase services to clients as well as enhance collections.

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Washington surpassed the federal benchmarks in seven of the eight program areas for the second year in a row. Case Closure compliance is still below federal benchmark, but made significant improvement this year. This improvement is due to the corrective action plan developed and implemented last year after the self-assessment process was finalized for FFY02. A workgroup consisting of field and headquarter experts reviewed the reasons for failure and a corrective action plan was developed. Implementation of the plan began in January 2003 when clear written procedures were published and distributed statewide. On-site training to all staff involved in the case closure process began in February 2003. Quarterly audits of case closures began in each district office in April, with quality control reviews performed in headquarters beginning in May 2003. In July 2003, technological enhancements were implemented to the electronic case monitoring system to further reduce errors. Please see page 22 for a detailed explanation of this continuing corrective action plan. This plan will remain in effect until compliance is achieved once again.

METHODOLOGY

The primary focus of this audit was to conduct an annual self-assessment of Washington State's DCS IV-D caseload as required by OCSE. DCS' Audit Team, formerly called the Self-Assessment Unit, conducted the review. A representative sample was drawn from the IV-D caseload and individual cases were reviewed for compliance in nine program areas.

Sampling Procedures for 2002-2003 Self-Assessment Review

The OCSE Self-Assessment Workgroup proposed that the states attain a sample that achieved at least a 90 percent confidence level. The Workgroup determined that past federal audits followed a methodology that enabled them to achieve a 95 percent confidence level by randomly selecting 500 cases from the state's IV-D open case universe. They explained that the federal methodology is well documented and that, by utilizing the same sample selection procedures, a 250 case sample would achieve the desired 90 percent confidence level. The review team chose to conduct a 500 case review. The cases were drawn using the federal methodology for case selection and were randomly selected by using the program entitled the Decision Support System (DSS)^{1*}.

DSS – sampling criteria for 2002-2003 self-assessment review	
Criteria	Options
Field Office	Statewide
Status	Open (10/5/03 Data)
Case Type	TANF, Non-TANF, Medicaid, FC-TANF
Subro Case Types	TANF Type1
Interstate Types	All

Random Sample of IV-D Caseload

The DSS was used to select 500 IV-D cases that met the criteria in the table above. The population of cases from which the 500 review cases were randomly selected was 266,673 cases. The cases were drawn from the case data available as of October 5, 2003.

¹ The Decision Support System is a software program maintained by the MAPS section of DCS. DSS is a tool designed to allow DCS staff to obtain IV-D case information extracted from the Support Enforcement Management System (SEMS). DSS is also designed to select random samples of cases from SEMS that meet the selected case criteria.

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Distribution of Cases

The following shows the distribution of the cases drawn for the original sample by region and by field office:

Field Office	Cases Reviewed	Percentage of Total
Seattle	85	17.0%
Everett	71	14.2%
Spokane	66	13.2%
Vancouver	64	12.8%
Tacoma	58	11.6%
Fife	49	9.8%
Olympia	44	8.8%
Yakima	22	4.4%
Wenatchee	21	4.2%
Kennewick	18	3.6%

This distribution is consistent (within 2 percent) with the distribution of the total caseload within DCS.

Focused Sample for Case Closure

In the initial selection of 500 cases, DSS could not isolate cases that were closed during the review period, October 1, 2002 through September 30, 2003. After reviewing all cases in the original sample, we found Case Closure was an audit issue in only two cases. To ensure compliance, an additional sample of 148 cases was randomly selected from those cases (population consisted of 59,783 cases) that had been closed after September 30, 2002.

Focused Sample for Expedited Process

After reviewing all cases in the original sample, we found that Expedited Process was an audit issue in only 35 cases. To ensure compliance, we reviewed an additional 86 case sample, which was randomly selected using DSS from a population of 18,838 cases. DSS is unable to isolate cases that were served a notice during a specific time period. In order to select the required sample for the Expedited Process criteria, we chose cases that had an order entered after September 30, 2002. These cases were reviewed **only** for the Expedited Process criteria.

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We proved statistical significance in each program area by computing our Efficiency Rate, Standard Error Rate and Confidence Level based on guidance from the TEMPO publication received April 2002. We used a 90 percent confidence level as stipulated in federal regulations.

Performance Criteria	Sample Size	Efficiency Rate	Confidence Interval (upper)	Confidence Interval (lower)
Order Establishment	73	90	93.3	88.6
Expedited Process (6 month)	117	91	94.2	89.8
Expedited Process (12 month)	117	98	99.5	97.5
Review and Adjustment	262	96	98.0	95.0
Enforcement	377	94	96.4	92.8
Medical	331	92	94.2	89.9
Disbursement	293	97	98.3	95.5
Interstate	98	95	97.0	93.6
Closure	150	82	85.7	79.7

CATEGORY I – PROGRAM COMPLIANCE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

ORDER AND PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT

Observation:

Order and Paternity Establishment was an audit consideration in 15 percent (73 of 500) of the cases reviewed. To be considered in substantial compliance, 75 percent of the order and paternity establishment cases need to meet the requirements found in federal regulations. DCS achieved 90 percent (66 of 73 cases) compliance in the program criteria.

Criteria were met by:

- Establishment of an order during the review period; or
- Accomplishing service within 90 days of locate and less than 365 days have elapsed since the date of service; or
- Showing that diligent efforts to serve (as determined in 45 CFR 303.6(c)(2)) or bona fide efforts to locate were made (as determined in 45 CFR 303.3(b)(3) and 303.3(b)(5)) which toll the federal time frames; or less than 90 days elapsed since the date of locate to the end of the review period.

Seven cases failed for the following reasons:

- One case: DCS did not refer tribal case to tribal court until 18 months after case opening.
- One case: Prosecutor did not work the case for a year. As a result, the Non-custodial Parent (NCP) has not been served for paternity establishment.
- One case: The Prosecutor did not meet the 90 day service requirement. The NCP was located on 2/10/03, but not served until 6/25/03.
- Four cases: DCS did not access all appropriate locate sources, including a credit bureau check, within 75 days after locate became an issue.

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Recommendation:

DCS attained 90 percent accuracy and is well above the required 75 percent substantial compliance required by OCSE. However, the result in FFY 2003 decreased from 96 percent compliance in FFY 2002. To assure future compliance, the field offices should assure that County Prosecutors serve the NCP within 90 days after locating the NCP. DCS field offices should also attempt all necessary locate, including a credit bureau check when appropriate.

EXPEDITED PROCESS

Observation:

Expedited Process was an audit consideration in 117 cases. To be considered in substantial compliance, 75 percent of the Expedited Process cases must have an order established within six months from the date of service of a child support obligation and 90 percent of the cases must be completed within 12 months.

DCS achieved 91 percent (107 of 117 cases) compliance for the six month criterion. An order was established in 98 percent (115 of 117 cases) of the cases within 12 months of the NCP being served a notice of child support obligation. The orders were entered in 14 months and 20 months respectively for the two failing cases.

Please note that expedited process was an audit consideration in only six percent (31 of 500) of the original sample. Therefore, an additional focused sample was drawn from the population of cases with orders served during the review period to bring the sample total to 117 cases.

Recommendation:

None

REVIEW AND ADJUSTMENT

Observation:

Review and Adjustment was an audit consideration in 52 percent (262 of 500) of the cases reviewed. To be considered in substantial compliance, 75 percent of the review and adjustment cases need to meet federal requirements found in federal regulations. DCS achieved 96 percent (252 of 262 cases) compliance in the program criterion.

DCS has a more restrictive policy for the Review and Adjustment of cases than the federal guidelines. There is a procedure for non-assistance cases and one for cases where the Custodial Parent (CP) receives Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). DCS staff surveys non-assistance cases for possible review only upon request. TANF cases are reviewed once every three years, even if a request for review is not received. Parties of both non-assistance and TANF cases are notified once every three years that they have the right to request a review.

When DCS receives a request for modification, the Support Enforcement Officer (SEO) checks the packet for completeness, for jurisdictional issues, and to see if a review is appropriate. This process is referred to as the “survey”. The next step in the process is the “review”. For the review, the SEO completes worksheets to determine if referral to the appropriate county prosecutor is needed. For the purposes of this element, the “start date” is defined as the date a request for modification is received, 36 months from the order date, or 36 months from the date that the order was last reviewed for adjustment.

Ten cases or nearly 4 percent of the cases reviewed failed the Review and Adjustment criteria. Seven cases failed because the parties were not notified of their right to request that DCS review their order for adjustment. A valid mailing address for both parties on the case is necessary for the notification to be sent. One of these seven failing cases was a case already at the county prosecutor's office for contempt. The coding used to signify that the case was at the prosecutor's office for contempt prevented the notice to request a review from being automatically sent to the parties. The remaining three cases appeared to fail as a result of a missing Last Modification Entered (LME) date entered in SEMS or they resulted from a judgment decision by the SEO, where adjustment was to be postponed but then was not subsequently completed.

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On two cases failure was due to inaccurate coding on the “Order Record Screen” which prevented notification to the parties of the right to request a review. The last case failed due to delays at the county prosecutor's office in entering an order.

Recommendation:

None

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

Observation:

Enforcement was an audit consideration in 75 percent (377 of 500) of the cases reviewed. To be considered in substantial compliance, 75 percent of the enforcement cases need to meet the requirements found in federal regulations. DCS achieved 94 percent (355 of 377 cases) compliance in the program area.

Of the 355 successful cases, 251 were successful for one of the following reasons:

- DCS received a wage withholding payment in the last quarter of the review period, or
- DCS received a payment during the review period which resulted from a collection action other than wage withholding.

Federal regulations also require DCS to submit cases with arrears for federal tax offset. In all cases in which enforcement was an issue, DCS either submitted the case for federal tax offset or the case was not appropriate for submission.

In 22 cases or 6 percent of the 377 case sample, DCS did not comply with federal requirements for the following reasons:

- In 11 cases, DCS did not take a timely wage withholding action when required. The NCP was paying voluntarily and was current on four of these cases, but a potential employer was known.
- In eight cases, DCS did not meet federal asset locate requirements. To meet federal requirements, DCS must access all appropriate locate resources. These include the CP, FPLS, U.S. Postal Service, state employment security agency, unemployment data, Department of Motor Vehicles, credit bureaus, and quick locate to other states.
- In two cases, DCS did not open the case within the federal time frame.
- In one case, DCS did not take an appropriate collection action other than wage withholding.

Recommendation:

None

MEDICAL ENFORCEMENT

Observation:

Medical Enforcement was an audit consideration in 66 percent (331 of 500) of the cases reviewed. To be considered in substantial compliance, 75 percent of the Medical Enforcement cases need to meet the requirements found in the federal regulations. DCS achieved 92 percent (303 of 331 cases) compliance in this program criterion.

The results are similar to the 91 percent compliance found in the self-assessment review for federal fiscal year 2002.

Twenty-eight cases did not substantially comply with federal regulations. The audit errors are noted below. Because three of the 28 error cases contained multiple errors, the total number of errors noted below will be 31.

In 28 cases, DCS did not take appropriate steps to determine if health insurance was available through an employer, the military, or a labor union.

- Of these, in ten of the 28 cases, withholding orders were sent to the employer but no medical information was provided in the answer and the RSEO did not follow up.
- In another ten cases, no medical enforcement was taken by the RSEO although collection actions were taken to enforce child support (two of these cases were situations where the NCP was in the military and it is definite that medical should have been available for the dependent children).
- In eight of the 28 cases, inadequate research was performed by the RSEO to determine the availability of medical coverage. In two of these eight cases, the reviewer noted that while the RSEO or field office may have known about the specific local employer, a third party unfamiliar to the area or the cases was completely reliant on information posted to the official case record.

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- In one case DCS did not enforce the medical insurance requirement after determining that medical insurance was available through an employer, the military, or a labor union.
- In two cases, DCS either failed to request that an employer inform DCS of lapses in insurance coverage or failed to adequately determine what coverage was available. The children were covered by insurance provided through private employers (non-governmental or military).

Recommendation:

None

DISBURSEMENT

Observation:

Disbursement was an audit consideration in 59 percent (293 of 500) of the cases reviewed. To be considered in substantial compliance, 75 percent of the disbursement cases need to meet the requirements found in federal regulations. DCS achieved 97 percent (283 of 293 cases) compliance in this program criterion.

A case meets the federal disbursement requirement if the payment is mailed within two business days of receipt. The DCS vendor mails payments the day after processing. For a payment to meet the requirement, it must be processed no later than the day after it is received.

Ten cases in the review received a payment which did not meet the federal disbursement requirement. For cases exceeding the disbursement time frame, the average number of business days after the date the payment was received to the date the payment was processed was 2.0 days.

Included in this review were cases with a payment that was collected and distributed during the last quarter of the review period. A payment was reviewed for the disbursement timeframe only if sufficient information identifying the payee was provided.

Recommendation:

None

INTERSTATE SERVICES

Observation:

Interstate Services was an audit consideration in just over 19 percent (98 of 500) of the cases reviewed. To be considered in substantial compliance, 75 percent of the Interstate Services cases need to meet the requirements found in the federal regulations. DCS achieved 95 percent compliance (93 of 98 cases) in this program criterion.

Overall interstate program compliance improved from 86 percent in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2002. FFY02 showed only a marginal improvement after results had declined for the previous three years.

Initiating Interstate

DCS was the initiating state in 44 of the 98 sample cases. DCS met the federal requirements in 89 percent (39 of 44) of the initiating cases reviewed. This marks a small improvement from the previous year's compliance rate of 86 percent.

Five cases did not substantially comply with federal regulations. All of these cases did not complete a timely referral or provide new information to a responding state within required federal timeframes.

Responding Interstate

DCS was the responding state in 54 of the 98 sample cases. DCS met the federal requirements in 100 percent of the responding cases reviewed. This compares favorably with the prior three years' compliance rates of 85 percent and 90 percent respectively.

Recommendation:

None

CASE CLOSURE

Observation:

Case closure was an audit consideration in 150 cases. To be considered in substantial compliance, 90 percent of the closed cases need to meet the requirements found in federal regulations. DCS achieved 82 percent (123 of 150 cases) compliance in this program criterion.

Twenty-seven cases did not substantially comply with federal regulations. The audit errors are noted below. Because eight of the 27 error cases contained multiple errors, the total number of errors will be 35.

Of the 35 errors, 11 failed due to not meeting a federal closure reason. Fourteen cases failed because a 60 day closure notice was not sent when required. Ten cases failed because they did not remain open for the required 60 day period.

Although still in the failing range, this reflects a 16 percentage point improvement over the previous year (FFY02) and reflects the improvements made as a result of the additional training and corrective action following the determination of last year's result.

Recommendation:

The corrective action plan incorporated into last year's report remains in effect and an overview of the plan and results are found on page 22 – 24.

CASE CLOSURE CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN

The following four elements make up the corrective action plan developed and implemented based on case closure results from FFY02 Self-Assessment Review.

1. Written Guidelines

On January 30, 2003, DCS issued revised case closure guidelines. The guidelines revise the current DCS policies and procedures found in the DCS Handbook. The guidelines now accurately reflect the federal case closure requirements.

DCS also provided child support staff with a Quick Reference Guide. The Guide will help all staff verify that they are following correct case closure procedures.

2. Training

DCS conducted and concluded mandatory staff training in February and March 2003. The training included a quiz to test understanding of the case closure requirements. In addition, DCS has implemented a case closure training website. The website provides links to relevant training materials and answers frequently asked questions.

3. Monitoring

Beginning in April 2003, DCS unit supervisors in each field office began conducting quarterly case closure reviews. The supervisors review a random 25 percent sample of the case closures which occurred in their teams during the previous quarter. The supervisors provide feedback to child support staff on the results of their review and assure that any misunderstandings of current policy are corrected.

The MAPS Audit Team at DCS Headquarters conducts routine quality control (QC) reviews of the supervisor audits. MAPS conducted the first review in May 2003. The QC reviews will continue each quarter thereafter. MAPS will provide feedback to the Field Office Chief, District Managers and Field Office Supervisors.

4. Technology Enhancements

DCS revised our automated case closure procedures after July 2003. The revision assures that the parties to a child support case receive adequate notice of the division's intent to close the case. In addition, the revised procedures assure that a case is not formally closed until the required 60 day waiting period has expired on applicable cases.

FFY03 Results

In January and February 2004 DCS conducted the FFY03 Federal Self-Assessment review. Results of that audit confirmed that DCS had significantly improved the Case Closure results from the previous period, increasing the compliance level 16 percentage points to 82 percent compliance. Although still not meeting the federal threshold, DCS has significantly improved performance.

Because the revised case closure instructions based on the corrective action plan were not released until January 30, 2003, only two complete quarters of FFY03 benefited from implementing this initiative.

► 1st Qtr 2003 QC Results:

A statewide random sample of 3,382 closed cases was reviewed by SEO 4s. This represents one-quarter of the total cases closed statewide during 1st quarter 2003. The MAPS Audit Team performed a QC review on approximately one-quarter of the SEO 4 sample.

Our case closure compliance rate was 81 percent.

► 2nd Qtr 2003 QC Results:

MAPS provided the 2nd Quarter (April – June) 2003 closure sample for SEO 4 review during July and MAPS completed the QC review and analysis on the results. Statewide, a random sample of 4,306 closed cases was reviewed by SEO 4s. This represents one-quarter of the total cases closed statewide during 2nd quarter 2003. The MAPS Audit Team performed a QC review on approximately one-quarter of the SEO 4 sample.

The 2nd Quarter Closure QC compliance rate improved to 84 percent. This improvement can be attributed to implementation of the second corrective action plan initiative, statewide case closure training for all caseload carrying staff.

► **3rd Qtr 2003 QC Results:**

MAPS provided the 3rd Quarter (July – September) 2003 closure sample for SEO 4 review in October and MAPS completed the QC review and analysis on the results in early December. Statewide, a random sample of 3,810 closed cases was reviewed by SEO 4s. This represents one-quarter of the total cases closed statewide during 3rd quarter 2003. The MAPS Audit Team performed a QC review on approximately one-quarter of the SEO 4 sample. The 3rd Quarter results showed an improvement of the compliance rate to 91 percent.

By the end of this review period all four corrective action plan initiatives were in place.

► **4th Qtr 2003 QC Results:**

MAPS provided the 4th Quarter (October – December) 2003 closure sample of 3,554 cases for SEO 4 review in January 2004. MAPS Audit staff completed the QC review of a one quarter random sample of the SEO 4 sample. The 4th Quarter QC compliance rate was 90 percent, which meets the federal compliance benchmark for the second consecutive quarter.

Corrective Action Progress Summary

Even though the results of FFY03 Self-Assessment Review still indicate case closure results below the federal benchmark, the quarterly reviews by SEO 4 and QC audits by MAPS Audit staff indicate that good progress is being made.

The corrective action plan implemented last year will remain in effect. It is our hope that continued success in the quarterly audits will ensure a successful case closure performance outcome for FFY04.

CATEGORY II: PROGRAM SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS

Electronic Payment Methods

DCS continues to pursue increased use of electronic methods for child support payments both received and disbursed. An internet website, the Child Support Internet Payment Service (CSIPS), provides a secure and convenient way to make child support payments online. Developed primarily for employers who deduct child support from their employees' pay, as well as for individual paying parents, the CSIPS is available nationwide at no cost to users. The system allows faster and less costly processing of child support payments. The website won two major awards in 2003. The Washington Software Alliance awarded first place to DCS in the "Outstanding Contribution to Digital Government" category. In May 2003, Governor Gary Locke presented DCS with his quality award for "Public Value and Benefit" in recognition of the CSIPS.

The CSIPS site is being expanded to increase its functionality to the public and increase its visibility. The option of scheduling repetitive debits was added in July 2003. This feature allows payers to schedule payments on the same day every month. In February 2004, a feature to allow NCPs and CPs to view their last five payments or disbursements was added. While this feature can be used by individuals who have signed up to use the payment site, others can sign up to see their payments with a simplified registration process.

DCS continues to expand outreach to employers and individuals to market the use of the CSIPS. During the past year, DCS produced four radio and television Public Service Announcements promoting the CSIPS which were distributed to media outlets around the state.

For child support disbursements, DCS fully implemented the DCS Secure Card during 2003. The DCS Secure Card is a stored value card that CPs can use like a debit card to access their funds. The card can be used anywhere a credit card is accepted, at an ATM or it can be used to transfer funds to another account. It is an additional tool that DCS uses to reduce the expenses associated with mailing paper checks. The card is being marketed to CPs who are not interested in direct deposit of their child support to a bank account. DCS worked with US Bank on media exposure of the card during the past

year. The DCS Secure Card was recently named a finalist for the Governor's Award for Quality and Performance that will be awarded in May, 2004.

Electronic Case Files and Centralized Mail

Case file imaging and centralized mail processing/imaging are two major initiatives implemented by DCS to take advantage of imaging technology. The statewide centralization and imaging for all incoming and outgoing DCS case file correspondence was fully implemented in November 2002. As of June 2003, all case file documents were scanned during a back-file conversion project. The back-file conversion for closed cases is underway. Some of the benefits of imaging include time savings in filing and retrieving documents, access to imaged documents and case files regardless of which office owns the case file, elimination of the need for an archiving process for closed files, better preservation of documents, the ability to process mail more efficiently in a production environment, and significant savings in facilities, equipment, postal costs and staff resources.

DCS was recognized for its continuing work in document imaging by OCSE when it was awarded the "Commissioner's Award for Effective Problem Solving through Automation" in 2002. The DCS Fife Field Office was the first "paperless" Child Support Office in the country when it became fully imaged in July 2002.

Electronic Referral

The Child Support Referral, the form used by the IV-A agency to transmit TANF client information, has been eliminated in Washington. The Community Service Division (CSD) began transmitting referral information to DCS electronically in September 2003. The change was based on the results of a parallel process that ran for several months comparing the information provided by the client on the paper referral with the information entered on the electronic referral. Several technical and training issues were identified during the process. It is a major change for field staff in both agencies. It is an important change, however, because it eliminates the need to pass huge amounts of paper from one division to another.

Medical Support Enforcement

In 2003, DCS conducted a joint pilot project with the Title 19 Medicaid agency to test the concept of centralizing some of the medical support enforcement duties. The cut-off date for the pilot was October 15, 2003. Tracking of the cost savings for the test and control cases by the Medicaid agency will continue until mid-2004. In October 2003, DCS received a federal demonstration grant for medical support, which will run through 2004. Two projects are covered by the grant. They are the centralization project cited above and an insurance location project using private vendors. The vendors will run NCP, CP and child information through their proprietary databases to try to find additional insurance information that DCS does not already have. The Medicaid agency will track cost savings on these cases. DCS has contracted with ECONorthwest to evaluate the two projects.

Tribal Relations

The State Tribal Relations Team (STRT) includes representatives from DCS Headquarters, District Offices and the ESA State Tribal Relations Unit (STRU). They work government to government with Indian Tribes in an effort to provide culturally relevant child support services to Indian children and families. Their collaborative efforts have resulted in three Tribal IV-D programs, four cooperative child support agreements, two child support agreements with tribes that have Tribal TANF programs, and working relationships and informal child support processes with 20 tribes.

STRT further enhanced the DCS Tribal Relations Internet site (www.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/tribal) as a technical resource for stakeholders and Tribes. STRT staff continue to provide child support resource materials (documents, PowerPoint presentations, flow charts, and checklists), training, and outreach services to interested Tribes. STRT is piloting a web-based application to give Tribal IV-D programs and Tribal TANF programs limited access to SEMS information.

Incarcerated Non-custodial Parents

DCS recently completed the Joint Agency Collection Project (also called Criminal Justice Project), a federal grant-funded study of child support outreach methods to incarcerated NCPs. DCS operated this project in cooperation with two other Washington State agencies, the Employment Security Department and the Department of Corrections. The project had three objectives. The first objective was to help NCPs obtain employment quickly

after being released from prison thereby resulting in an increase in child support payments from this group. The second objective was to help NCPs modify their support orders to be more in line with their financial circumstances. The third objective was to examine accumulated child support arrears and determine if DCS could offer the NCP some relief from excessive debt. Meeting these objectives would theoretically decrease the likelihood of inmates re-offending and returning to prison.

DCS tested an information brochure, a video, and selected in-person visits to NCPs during the project. A copy of the video was sent to every IV-D director. Response from child support programs across the country and professionals working with inmates has been very positive. Project successes will be difficult to measure until NCPs are released from prison. However, the efforts of project staff were beneficial for a large number of incarcerated NCPs who now have better relationships with DCS, more equitable child support amounts, more hope of consistent payments in the future and children who enjoy more consistent support.

DCS/DOC Partnership on Inmate Accounts

Recent legislation requires the Department of Corrections (DOC) to withhold 15 percent from an inmates Class II, III, or IV earnings or gratuities, or from other deposits made into their inmate accounts. DCS provides DOC with electronic data each month matching inmates against NCPs who owe child support. The collections for the first four months in the DCS/DOC partnership on inmate accounts total over \$70,095.

Child Support Debt Registry

The Child Support Debt Registry is an internet accessible database of delinquent NCPs. The police, sheriff and State Patrol check the database before returning any funds to detainees. If the search results in a match, DCS is notified and has an opportunity to issue a withholding notice to intercept the funds to satisfy child support debts.

Child Support Awareness Month

For the past four years, DCS celebrated Child Support Awareness Month during a Seattle Mariners baseball game in Seattle. The Mariners featured publicity photos and child support Public Service during the game. The PSAs have also been distributed to radio and television stations throughout Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska as part of the ongoing regional fatherhood campaign.

DCS plans to produce new PSAs during the upcoming campaign which will feature two new Mariner players. An effort will be made to work with the states of Alaska, Idaho and Oregon on sharing the cost of production for a regional campaign. DCS will again work with the team on a special game in August promoting Child Support Awareness Month.

Coordinated Services Initiative

The Coordinated Services Initiative coordinates DSHS services within DSHS agencies to assure excellent customer service to clients and community partners. DCS assists local Community Service Offices to meet the following expected outcomes:

- Increased collaboration within the department and with community partners.
- Increased knowledge of each other's programs and services.
- Involvement of the client in the process of planning and developing a coordinated services plan.
- Development of a coordinated action plan.
- Limited duplication of services.
- Increased Customer Service.

Efforts to Improve Client Services

To provide staff with more effective communication skills, DCS contracted with Verbal Judo, Inc. to provide "Verbal Judo" training to all staff. The goal is to provide staff with the tools to manage stressful and potentially hostile confrontations with customers and to be able to direct the communication to a successful interaction.

Verbal Judo is based on the principle of Judo itself: using the energy of others to master situations. It contains a set of communication principles and tactics that enable the user to generate cooperation and gain voluntary compliance in others under stressful conditions such as upset or frightened clients, or any action which places the organization and the community at odds with each other. Verbal Judo teaches a philosophy of how to look creatively at conflict, offering specific, powerful and usable strategies to resolve tense situations. Staff learn to respond to situations, rather than to react to personal feelings, and understand how to deal with difficult people using conflict management tactics to defuse confrontational encounters.

Access and Visitation

DCS continues to administer several Federal Grant funded Access and Visitation Projects throughout Washington. Many of the clients receiving services under these projects are low-income parents. Assisting clients in this way not only gives the parent-child relationship a framework for access and visitation, but often allocates responsibility for the child's medical, educational and life needs.

Services provided include assisting unmarried parents who have signed a paternity affidavit to obtain a legally enforceable parenting plan; providing assistance to families, parents and caretakers in entering, modifying and enforcing parenting plans; and mediation of issues where parental access is in dispute through county based Dispute Resolution Centers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DCS was found in substantial compliance in seven of eight federal program areas. DCS management and staff should be commended for their outstanding efforts in the successful program results and the quick response to enact comprehensive corrective action to improve compliance in case closure.

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